

Exhibit No. 2  
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Bill No. SB 13

Senate Bill 13  
January 13, 2010  
Presented by Charles Van Genderen  
Senate Finance and Claims

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Charles Van Genderen, State Parks Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition of Senate Bill 13.

This bill would make the vehicle registration fee opt-in and that will hurt Montanans. In reality, this bill revisits an old issue that goes well beyond whether the fee is opt in or opt out. It really goes to the question of how do we pay for a state park system?

In 1989 under Governor Stephens, the state park system was struggling with funding. A committee was appointed to look at funding ideas and the state park futures report was produced. In 2002 under Governor Martz, the same thing happened and a second committee was appointed with a second report produced. In that report the idea for a vehicle registration was born. At the time, Senators Bob Keenan, Senator Dale Mahlum and others saw this as a viable fix. The topic was debated deeply during that session. They looked at general fund monies and did not want to give state parks any. They looked at user fees and saw you could not generate enough. They looked at making the fee mandatory and that looked like a tax. They looked at Opt in and realized that no one participates. So they passed an opt-out bill and took away all general fund support of the state park system. Also the state park system gets no hunting or fishing license money. (A copy of both reports provided to committee.) So that is how we got here.

So what has happened since then? State parks have hosted a 78% increase in resident use of state parks. Visitor satisfaction grew to a new high of 94%. We reached a new high of 2 million visits to the park system. We have improved our weed control and our service and we have made a large contribution to the tourism economy – with tens of millions of dollars being spent from non-residents and around 1,600 tourism related jobs. Most importantly, Montanan's are using their state parks during this recession more than ever before. It is all in this Bureau of Business and Economic Research 2010 report.

Also, it is important to note that 5 other states have implemented, or are working to implement, a vehicle registration like Montana's. One of those states is Washington. They went opt-in originally and saw 2-3% participation. Washington changed the law in 2009 to opt-out – and they proved what the 2003 Legislature felt. If this bill were to pass, state parks are estimated to lose more than \$1.4 million in 2012 and more than \$2.6 million in 2013 and beyond; revenue loss for the FAS program would be \$100,000 and \$187,000 respectively. State parks would be closed and FAS maintenance would be cut back.

While it is clear that we are struggling to come out of a recession and times are tough, families are using state parks more than ever before. Montanan's are staying close to home and going to affordable places where they can have a good time. In closing, Senate Bill 13 revisits an old issue that was effectively addressed in 2003. Opt out works – so let's keep it.

Please say no to SB 13.